

## A Look at the Effects of The Australian Study Abroad Experience on Students' Motivation

Hudson Murrell

Students were given a fifteen question survey before and after their study abroad experience. This survey asked about feelings towards study and living experiences, including what things the students were and were not comfortable doing. Students were given space to write extra comments at the end.

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### 1. The Surveys: questions and intent

Students were given a fifteen question survey two months before leaving for Australia, and then a similar survey shortly after their return to Japan. These surveys dealt with comfort-levels and motivation (willingness) concerning English related activities, but it did not question their current TOEIC scores or ability level. All thirty-four of the participants answered the 'before' survey, but only thirty answered the 'after' survey. There was a 'preparation seminar' class in which all filled out the 'before' survey, but as that class doesn't exist in this second semester, students were given the 'after' survey and asked hand it in after they had filled it out. There was no penalty for not filling it out.

The first four questions of the survey dealt with food, in particular about breakfast and lunch. The first question asked what foods they currently usually eat for breakfast, and Question 2 asked what foods they would be comfortable eating for breakfast. Questions 3 and 4 dealt identically with lunch habits.

The next two questions referred to time, in particular about what time the students go to bed, and what time they wake up. This was done so that the students would realize the big change in store for them when they went to Australia.

Questions 6 and 7 were centered around confidence levels, specifically both in using public transportation abroad and also in speaking with foreigners

(unspecified where this would take place). In these questions, they were to circle one of six possible answers from extremely worried ('no way,') to highly confident ('no problem').

Question 8 was about worries. They were to number from most worrisome (1) to least worrisome (10) items that were chosen for their 'excitement' or 'risk' factor ('language,' 'homestay personalities,' and 'snacks,' to list a few examples). Question 8 was altered for the 'after returning' form to "What are your biggest worries about living in a foreign country now?"

In question 9, students had to circle their one choice of which out of ten things (identical list from question 8) they are looking forward to the most. This was designed for multiple purposes: to show them that not everything on the survey was about 'worries,' but instead also 'positive' things, and also to foment the idea that one of their biggest fears could also be something that they look forward to.

Question 10 asked them to estimate the amount of time that they normally spend in the bath. This was designed to start a discussion about length of time that they bathe, as well as how to shorten this time length. Most students were shocked to learn that they would have only four or five minutes to bathe in Australia, and that there are very few baths.

Question 11 asked about confidence in reading a menu and ordering food in a restaurant in a foreign country.

The final two questions in the 'before' survey, dealt with the amount of time they actually spent studying English now, and with the amount of time they would be comfortable spending studying English while abroad.

At the end space was left for comments or questions that any of them had.

On the 'after' survey, these two questions were followed by a question asking the students "How have you changed because of this study abroad trip?" This question was added after they returned, because there were very few "optional" comments written by the students at the end of the 'before' survey. A more pointed question was written on the 'after' survey in hopes that the students would write more comments (rather than giving the students freedom to write anything 'extra' that they felt).

## 2. The Answers

While in Japan, most of the students ate rather Spartan breakfasts, according to their answers to question number one. Eighty percent of the students ate only one food group and had one liquid. For example, one student circled only "fruit" and "coffee," while another circled "rice ball" and "juice." It was very rare for a student to answer with more than one beverage, but many students circled "rice" along with other choices, such as "miso soup" or "meat."

These answers did not vary by a large degree between the "before" and "after" surveys. There were more answers of "juice" in the "after" survey, usually along with other beverages, but there weren't any other significant changes.

Most students circled almost identical answers to question #2 "what would you be comfortable eating for breakfast now," as they had to the previous question #1, "what is your typical breakfast now," on the "before" survey. However, on the "after" survey, there was a change; students circled virtually every choice that was available to them when answering Question 2 about what they would be comfortable eating.

A very similar trend followed for Questions 3 and 4. On the 'before going' survey, more than half of the respondents (nineteen of thirty-four) had virtually identical answers to both of the 'what is your typical lunch now' and 'what would you be comfortable eating for lunch now' questions. Most students circled ONE liquid, along with 'rice,' and 'vegetables.' On the 'after returning' survey, more than 90% of the students circled four of the five liquids, and a similar number also tripled the number of items that indicated what they would be comfortable eating.

In regards to the time when students go to sleep, virtually all of the students circled between midnight and 2 am on both the before and after surveys.

However, in regards to the time when they usually wake up, in the 'before' survey 70% of students circled "7:00-7:59," while this 70% shifted to "6:00-6:50" on the 'after' survey.

Question 6 asked about their confidence in traveling on public transportation. Before leaving, a vast majority circled either "very worried" or "a little worried." However, on the 'after' survey, more than 80% circled either "a little

confident" or "no problem!"

Question 7 asked how confident the students were in talking with foreigners. It did not specify 'where' this conversation would take place, nor the topic. The answers differed greatly on the two surveys. On the 'before' survey, more than 75% of the students circled either "very worried" or "a little worried," while on the 'after' survey, more than 50% circled "worried, but I can do it." Another 25% circled the answer 'higher' on the confidence scale than that, by circling "a little confident."

Question 8 dealt with the students' biggest fears about their study abroad program. The answers that were most often circled on the 'before' survey were language, homestay personalities and studying. At the other end of the scale, the least often indicated were snacks and university people.

In the 'after' survey, the biggest worries about living in a foreign country now were most often indicated as homestay life and snacks.

However, in Question 9 in the 'before' survey, an overwhelming majority of the students marked that they were most looking forward to studying and homestay. In the 'after' survey, the students were almost unanimous in indicating that what they missed most about the program was their homestay life or homestay personalities, although three responses did indicate that they missed 'studying.'

Question 10 was designed to instigate a discussion about bathing and water supply. It was successful for the most part. On the 'before' survey, most students averaged "31-45" minutes although there were answers in all categories. There were five outliers, with two respondents in the '0-15 minutes' category, and three in the 'more than 60' category. On the 'after' survey, again the average was in the "31-45" range, but of the thirty respondents, thirteen were in that range, while this time there were far more outliers. This time there were five students in the 'more than 60' range, and four in the '0-15 minutes' category.

Question 11, about foreign restaurants, didn't produce unexpected changes between the 'before' and 'after' responses. In the 'before' survey, twenty-two of the respondents indicated that they were "a little worried" about reading a menu and ordering food. In the 'after' survey, twenty-seven of them indicated "worried, but

I can do it," with the other three respondents showing even more confidence.

Question 12 asked them the total amount of time that they spend studying English at night. On the 'before' survey, most students replied "45-60" minutes. No one replied "more than two hours." However, in the 'after' survey most students were over an hour, and there were four that spent more than two hours.

In Question 13, when asked about the amount of time they'd be comfortable studying, only three of the 'before' respondents indicated anything different from their answer to Question 12. Those three indicated a higher number in terms of minutes that they would be comfortable studying (opposed to the number they actually spend studying). On the 'after' survey, only two students' answers on Question 13 varied from Question 12, with both of them stating that they'd be comfortable spending a little more time studying than they do at present.

On the 'before' survey, there were only two comments from students, "Look forward to Australia," and "thank you."

On the 'after' survey, students were asked a direct question about how they have changed. The vast majority of answers dealt with improved English ability ("My English ability improved day by day") or confidence ("I'm not keyed up when talking with a foreigner," and "I could gain confidence in my own ability"). Some stated that they felt they had matured as well. A few wrote about diet ("my appetite has increased") or homestay chores ("I helped with housework now"). Thankfully, two replies were about future study abroad ("I started thinking about going to the US"), and also about personal habits ("I wake up earlier.")

### 3. Interpretations and Ramifications

The students' apparent willingness to eat a wider-variety of foods could be a direct result of the breakfasts (and food) that they ate while in Australia. While in Australia, very few of them had rice for breakfast. Also, the addition of 'Morning Tea' to their diets undoubtedly influenced the way they look at morning foods.

Similarly, students seemed much more open to types of food and drink to consume for lunch after their journey than before. Undoubtedly the students tasted a variety of different (and new) foods in Australia, and judging from the

results of this survey, the students had a positive response.

In regards to sleeping and waking time, the students' change in habits could be a result of their study abroad experience. In Australia, particularly Toowoomba, energy is not as cheap or as readily available as in Japan. The local residents follow more closely to traditional 'farmer's hours,' in that they go to sleep and rise "with the sun." In Japan, most students went to sleep after midnight, but in Toowoomba this shifted a full two hours earlier for most of the students, as their entire homestay households generally went to sleep around 10 pm. Likewise, as households wake with the sun in Toowoomba, Baiko students were forced to adjust their internal clocks in order to eat and start their day with their families.

Question 6 had the most visible difference in replies for the 'before' and 'after' surveys. The students were very worried before going, but after living in Toowoomba and using the public transportation, they realized that it was not as difficult as they had imagined. Either the students were taught well about the use of transportation, or this was simply an unsubstantiated fear.

It would appear from the answers to Question 7 that the students are in fact more confident in their ability to talk with foreigners. There are many possibilities for reasons as to why this could happen. Perhaps their English ability is better. Perhaps they understand the background of being a foreigner in a country. Perhaps they've learned to overcome innate shyness.

The answers to Question 8 on the 'before' survey surrounded problems with the language. The students were apprehensive about the amount of studying they would face in Australia, as well as their homestays, but all of these have the central theme of language problem. The students' answers to Question 8 on the 'after' survey lead me to believe that when they think about traveling to a foreign country, they think most about homestay family and accommodations as well as snacks. The average student gained three kilograms during their two month stay in Australia. This is due to a number of reasons, including increased number of meals (there is no 'morning tea' in Japan) as well as simply a different diet. The snacks are different from in Japan, and probably more fattening in the students' eyes.

Question 9 on the 'before' survey was answered in a predictable fashion.

Many of the students were going abroad for the first time in their lives, and thus were apprehensive about the homestay. Their main purpose for going was to study. However, some students did mark the same answer for "biggest worry" as well as for what they were looking forward to the most.

Answers to Question 9 on the 'after' survey were also predictable. None of the students needed to change homestay families (unlike previous years), thus everyone seemed to form solid relationships with other members of the families. It was encouraging when three students indicated that they would miss studying English.

Question 10 was interesting in both surveys. In the 'before' survey, after handing in the survey the students talked about this question more than any other. They had been informed that in Australia they most likely would need to limit their showering time to four minutes. Most of them could not believe this, nor understand why this was so important. They came to realize that water is a resource, and while in Japan it is plentiful everywhere, they were slowly understanding that in Australia this would not be the case.

In the 'after' survey of Question 10, the outliers were intriguing. Due to the anonymous survey results, individuals could not be asked why they were taking shorter or longer baths. Were they shorter because they have learned the importance of water, and also its scarcity in many parts of the world? Were they shorter because they value their free time more? Or perhaps the students have moved from their home into an apartment, and no longer have others to prepare a comfortable bath for them. On the flip side, why were the baths longer? Was it because they value baths more now, after having been exposed to a life where they cannot enjoy long baths? Perhaps it is because they cherish 'Japanese' things more now. Having been exposed to a more cosmopolitan lifestyle, perhaps they understand themselves to be more 'Japanese' than before.

Question 11 didn't provide any enlightening data. After two months of study and life in Australia, the students gained confidence (slightly) in reading menus and ordering in foreign restaurants. This is as was expected.

The answers to Question 12 were a bit more surprising. The results, indicating a trend toward spending more time studying English everyday 'after' than

they had 'before,' could be a lasting effect from their study habits in Australia. In Australia they studied only English at night (not other subjects), thus gaining the habit of allotting a large amount of time to it. Perhaps some students have more motivation for studying now, after having their horizons broadened from their travel abroad.

Question 13 didn't provide any significant information regarding the students and their study habits.

On the 'after' survey, students provided a good number of responses to the final question about their inner changes. They were reflective, citing changes in study habits as well as in their confidence interacting in and English world. Most students seem to have realized that they have changed in a noticeable way, and were able to state that change in an English answer. It'll be interesting to observe the progress that students make after returning from Australia.

#### 4. Problems and Further Thoughts

There are many possible explanations for the different answers on the 'before' and 'after' surveys. It could be that students understood the questions better when filling out the "after" survey. However, I did allow them time to talk about the meaning of the questions when we did the 'before' survey. I explained each question in English, and then let them talk about the meaning of the questions with the people sitting near them.

Of course this in itself could influence their answers. They filled out the 'before' answers in class, and thus had their neighbors looking at their answers. They could have been embarrassed or shy about giving truthful answers, and thus may have given untruthful answers. However, we can never know which way they 'fudged' their answers (leaning more toward studying and a love of English or more the other direction).

Giving them the 'after' survey and telling them to hand it in the next day seemed more effective (less external influence which could lead to bias involved) than doing it all in class (as we did for the 'before' survey). Some of them filled out the 'after' survey there on the spot, but others took a longer amount of time, and handed it in at 5pm the following day.



Question 9 led me to ponder the students' motivation for studying English. In the past, many 'returnees' from Australia go on to lose their desire to study English. They don't have the certain future opportunity for using English, and perhaps for that reason the fire inside of them wanes. It's important to make many attempts at rekindling this flame throughout the rest of their time at Baiko. Perhaps giving them the results of this survey would help. If they are able to improve on their TOEIC scores, that may help as well.

In terms of continuing their motivation, I attempt to use their emotional bond to their homestay as a tool for using (if not studying) English. I have them write 'thank you' letters and Christmas cards during their Writing classes.

Question 13 certainly needs to be changed somehow. As it stands, it offers very little insight on either 'before' or 'after' survey.

The students realized that their Australia experience changed them. However, it is uncertain whether they would come to this realization naturally, or only if pressed to do so on this sort of survey. Overall the experience certainly changed the students, and they all feel that it is in a positive manner. Their attitudes about English and their self-confidence both appear to have been boosted positively. The next problem is to harness this newfound motivation into further study. Some students admittedly are not looking for future study abroad opportunities, while others are certain that it is a goal of theirs. It is those students in the middle ground that need to be spurred on to further study-abroad experiences in the future.